

## THE ARNCLIFFE PUZZLE

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judgment in appraising this New World iconoclast as unfitted for the guardianship of Arncliffe's treasures.

Edith, of course, saw through the kindly badinage that endeavored to cheer her under painful circumstances. Though she was none the less resolved to make restitution, she felt that her task would be fraught with many difficulties and objection. It was the fault, perhaps, of her single-hearted honesty that she did not yet realize how slanderous tongues were already branding her as a schemer who had supplanted Lord Arncliffe's rightful heir. She had grave misgivings that her purity of motive was being impugned, but the episode of the three hundred pounds given to her by Lord Arncliffe was more nearly in her mind. Had she only taken Aingier into her confidence in that matter, she might have saved herself many heartburnings.

She had a brother, two years younger than herself, to whom the affections of her orphan heart were given without stint. She had regarded him with a selfless devotion that governed her whole life. Lord Arncliffe had helped the boy as he had helped her, and would have helped him onward in his career with no niggard hand had he shown himself worthy. But Lord Arncliffe, a man who had won a vast fortune by his own unaided efforts, would encourage no drones. Thus it was that the youngster, after receiving a sound education, was placed in a commercial house upon probation, with the ultimate prospect of a substantial position in one of the great enterprises under Lord Arncliffe's control, directly he should win his spurs in the arena of business.

And then came the old, old tragedy: a lad spending a little more than his salary, so that he might "do as the other fellows did"; a loving sister making matters worse by sending him every penny she could save out of her own earnings; and then a tampering with money-lenders, a juggling with accounts, a dread of disgrace, and a despairing threat, that was not, perhaps, merely a threat, to commit suicide.

It was only three hundred pounds, but Edith had already given him all she had, and it was then, in a frenzy of anguish, that she had appealed to Lord Arncliffe. The old peer had, indeed, given her the money—he would have saved young Holt from the consequences of his folly, even without Edith's intervention—but he had no sympathy with one who transgressed the first rule of a business career. He was so angry that Edith for the time being supposed her benefactor to be hopelessly offended with her.

"You can have the three hundred pounds you ask for," he had said, "but it will be the last money you can hope to receive from me. I had, of course, intended to make some provision for you after my death, but I should do you no kindness in giving you an income that would only be drained from you by your scamp of a brother."

Edith had not in anyway regretted her sacrifice. She believed her brother, who was really a good-hearted lad, would yet show himself a worthy member of society, and she was determined that, whatever might happen, his lapse from rectitude should remain a secret. This, then, was the cause of her agitation when she had been questioned so searchingly respecting the check for three hundred pounds. This was the cause of her fainting fit when the witness from New-York was announced. For it was to New-York her brother had gone when Lord Arncliffe insisted that he should leave the firm whose confidence in him was weakened, and make a fresh start. And for one unreasoning moment, she imagined it was her brother who had come forward to clear

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Edith slipped out on the balcony and left Aingier and Bradshaw talking together. Her thoughts wandered back to the rosy future she had mapped out for her bright, careless brother. He was to go to college for a year or two, grow steadier under a good tutor, and then, perhaps, enter the army. And presently he would meet some nice girl, and Edith would buy them a pretty little place and look after them until her reckless boy had learned to know the value of money so that he could be trusted with a great, great income of his own. And now it seemed that people were trying to drag that whole miserable business into the light—to ruin the boy's future all for one youthful folly.

"Never, if I die for it!" she exclaimed, bringing her little white teeth together with a snap. And then, woman-like, she began to sob hopelessly.

It was at this moment that Lester, who had been listening with exemplary patience to the placid iterations of Mrs. Aingier, made a decorous escape, and by happy instinct found himself on the balcony with Edith.

"May I intrude on your solitude, Miss Holt?" he said.

She gave him a tremulous smile and strove to frame an answer, but the smile took a downward curve and she was fain to turn her head away, though she put out a nervous, detaining hand in unaffected appeal for sympathy.

Lester promptly tucked that nervous hand tightly under his arm. There was nothing of familiarity or presumption in his action. It was in its inception the mere protective instinct of the strong man, as free from any thought save friendship as Edith's own involuntary movement.

Presently, indeed, he began to feel a magnetic glow from the hand. He was filled with a vague desire to slay unoffending dragons, so that his arm tightened to his side somewhat, since man cannot harbor such strenuous thoughts without some tensing of the muscles. And Edith would have slipped her hand away, only that her action would have seemed like a marked repulse, and that was not exactly her intent.

"I am very stupid to give way in this fashion," she faltered at last; "but it has been such a wearying day, and people appear to think dreadful things of me."

"My dear Miss Holt," protested Lester, "you must not notice all the vulgarities of a Coroner's inquest. It is not conducted according to ordinary rules, and any idiot can make himself as offensive as he pleases. I wouldn't give another thought to the matter."

"There is one thing I must think of. Of course, Dr. Lester—" Edith had regained possession of her hand by this time—"the appearance of Lord Arncliffe's nephew will make a great difference to me."

"But why?"

"Can't you see?" petulantly. "I dare not keep all this money when I know that Lord Arncliffe would have given it to his nephew if he had lived long enough to meet him."

"Well," admitted Lester, "I suppose the meeting might have brought about some change in the bequests; but I don't see, under the circumstances—"

"I shall hand over the estate to Mr. Bradshaw," said Edith with determination. "I want you to believe this, because I would not have you think me capable of acting dishonorably."

"Oh, don't picture me indulging in folly of that kind," exclaimed Lester impatiently, the emphasis of his reply conveying a compliment. "Of course, you are right in a way, but from the little I have seen of him, I think Bradshaw is not the man to take anything that he is not legally entitled to. In any case, it is evident that Lord Arncliffe would have made handsome provision for you."

"That is another matter," rejoined Edith. "But the real fortune should go to Mr. Bradshaw, and I shall never accept

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